Evidence Based Practices in School Mental Health: Anxiety

Background Information
Anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric disorders affecting children and adolescents with an average prevalence rate of about 8% (Albano, Chorpits, & Barlow, 2003). Children with internalizing disorders such as depression and anxiety are often overlooked, and symptoms and impairments are not addressed. Negative effects of anxiety in school-aged children include deficiencies in learning achievement and verbal and nonverbal problem solving, heightened dependence on adult attention seeking, increased aggressive feelings and low self-concept (Allen & Klein, 1996). It is particularly difficult to recognize anxiety symptoms in the school environment, because anxiety presents in many different ways, including irritability (Tomb & Hunter, 2004).

Characteristics of Childhood Anxiety Disorders
Anxiety disorders are an extremely broad category of disorders and the symptoms may vary considerably from one type of anxiety disorder to another; however some common elements are (Merrell, 2001):

- Negative and unrealistic thoughts
- Misinterpretation of symptoms and events
- Panic attacks
- Obsessions and/or compulsive behavior
- Physiological arousal
- Hypersensitivity to physical cues
- Fears and anxieties regarding specific situations or events
- Excessive worries in general

Types of Anxiety Disorders (DSM-IV)
- Separation Anxiety disorder
- Panic disorders
- Agoraphobia
- Specific phobias
- Social phobia
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Acute stress disorder
- Generalized anxiety disorder

What can Schools do Regarding Anxiety?
Preventive intervention can decrease the number or significance of risk factors that contribute to the onset of a disorder. Since the onset of anxiety disorders occur during childhood and adolescence, the most effective setting to implement preventative methods is in the school environment (Greenburg, Domitrovich & Bumbarger, 2001). Prevention and intervention for anxiety disorders should follow the three levels of prevention and intervention: universal, targeted, and intensive. The universal level of anxiety intervention includes positive school climate and a school-wide intervention or screening for all students. Targeted level of intervention targets a subgroup with risk factors for anxiety, or students that have suffered from a loss or traumatic event (Greenburg, et al., 2001). The intensive level of intervention targets individuals who exhibit early signs or biological markers related to anxiety. By implementing a three tiered model of universal, targeted, and intensive intervention efforts in schools, school practitioners can prevent anxiety from developing in students, as well as treat all students that are at-risk or already exhibiting anxiety (Greenburg, et al., 2001).

Disclaimer
The information gathered for this evidence-based practice sheet is a summary of common practices and/or programs with a strong research base and definitions found in recent literature. This summary is by no means a comprehensive representation of all information, definitions, programs, and standards to be found. In addition this information is not intended to provide any type of professional advice nor diagnostic service. The listing of a specific program within this sheet does not constitute as an endorsement from the CDE for the program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/Intervention</th>
<th>Publisher/Resources</th>
<th>Level of Intervention</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Type of research conducted</th>
<th>Research Sample</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ready . . . Set . . . R.E.L.A.X.</em></td>
<td>Allen &amp; Klein, 1996</td>
<td>Universal/Targeted</td>
<td>Elementary school children</td>
<td>Research/Applied With Fidelity</td>
<td>This program is based on research by Allen &amp; Klein (1996) that used PMR with normal populations of school children. Results showed significant improvement among participants on measures of skin temperature, respiration, heart rate, and state anxiety.</td>
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<td><strong>“Coping Cat” Program</strong></td>
<td>Kendall and Treadwell, 1996</td>
<td>Targeted/Intensive</td>
<td>Older Children and Adolescents</td>
<td>Research/ Applied With Fidelity</td>
<td>The sample consisted of 27 children receiving the intervention and 20 wait-list control participants. The intervention participants were mostly Caucasian (78 percent), and 22 percent were African American.</td>
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<td><strong>Transfer of Control Approach</strong></td>
<td>Silverman &amp; Kurtines, 1996</td>
<td>Intensive</td>
<td>Cognitively mature older children and adolescents</td>
<td>Research/ Applied With Fidelity</td>
<td>Samples have focused on clinical-based populations of youth; however there is a great deal of promise for use in school-based settings (Merrell, 2001).</td>
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<td><strong>Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)</strong></td>
<td>The CBITS treatment manual is available for purchase through Sopris West at (800) 547-6747 or: <a href="http://positiveschoolclimate.sopriswest.com/product.asp?productid=120">http://positiveschoolclimate.sopriswest.com/product.asp?productid=120</a>.</td>
<td>Targeted/Intensive</td>
<td>Children in grades six through nine.</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>A study conducted by Stein et al., (2003) included a sample consisting of English-speaking 6th graders from two middle schools in East LA. This study utilized a randomized controlled trial.</td>
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Resources

U.S. Department of Education

Promising Practices Network:
The Promising Practices Network (PPN) is a group of individuals and organizations that are dedicated to providing quality evidence-based information about what works to improve the lives of children, families, and communities.http://www.promisingpractices.net/

What Works Clearinghouse:
http://www.w-w-c.org/

National Institute of Mental Health:
2001 Executive Boulevard, Room 8184, 12th floor
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
866-615-6464
http://www.nimh.nih.gov/

Anxiety Disorders Association of America:
8730 Georgia Avenue, Suite 600
Silver Spring, MD 20910
240-485-1001
www.adaa.org

National Child Traumatic Stress Network:
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Parklawn Building, Room 17C-26
Rockville, MD 20857
301-443-2940
www.nctsnet.org

References


www.journalsapa.org/preventiondirectory:volume 4/pre0040001a.html pp:[np].


